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DANCERS (ATTN: FOREIGN; WOMEN'S; ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS) (3 TAKES)

(EDITORS: ONE PHOTO TO ACCOMPANY THIS STORY WAS AIR-MAILED FROM
LOS ANGELES FRIDAY.)

BY SALLY QUINN

(C) 1977; THE WASHINGTON POST

WHEN REGLA BECERRA FIRST CAME TO THE TROPICANA NIGHTCLUB AS A
DANCER 14 YEARS AGO SHE WAS NERVOUS.

FOR ONE THING; IT WASN'T THAT LONG AFTER THE REVOLUTION AND IN
THOSE DAYS NICE GIRLS DIDN'T DANCE IN NIGHTCLUBS.

"IN THOSE DAYS," SHE SAYS; "THE OWNERS OF THE NIGHTCLUBS HIRED
YOU. WHEN THERE WAS A PRETTY YOUNG GIRL THEY WOULD WANT TO GO TO
BED WITH HER; THEN MAYBE THEY WOULD GIVE HER A JOB;" MAYBE NOT.
BEFORE THE REVOLUTION IT WAS DIFFICULT. BECAUSE IF YOU GOT A JOB
EVERYBODY KNEW HOW YOU GOT IT."

"LOOK," SHE SAYS; "AFTER THE REVOLUTION THE ATTITUDE CHANGED

VERY RAPIDLY. THE OWNERS WERE NO LONGER THERE. MOST OF THE OLD DANCERS WHO HAD BEEN THERE BEFORE THE REVOLUTION HAD A BIG PROBLEM. BECAUSE THEY WERE USED TO THAT WAY OF LIFE."

REGLA BECERRA IS 31 YEARS OLD; A CHILD, IN FACT, OF THE REVOLUTION. YET SHE LOOKS EXACTLY THE WAY YOU WOULD EXPECT A DANCER AT THE TROPICANA TO LOOK LIKE; BEFORE OR AFTER THE REVOLUTION.

SHE IS VERY LATIN LOOKING; DARK-COMPLECTED WITH MASSES OF CURLY DARK HAIR HANGING DOWN HER BACK; HEAVY ON THE EYE MAKEUP; BRIGHT RED LIPS; LONG; PAINTED FINGERNAILS. SHE WEARS TIGHT SLACKS OVER HER AMPLE HIPS AND A TIGHT JERSEY SWEATER WITH A TINSEL EFFECT.

BACKSTAGE BEFORE A NIGHTLY PERFORMANCE SHE GIVES A VISITOR A TOUR OF THE DRESSING ROOMS; GAILY EXPLAINING THAT SINCE SHE IS THE STAR, SHE HAS A SPECIAL DRESSING ROOM. SHE WARNS NOT TO ASK THE AGES OF ANY OF THE DANCERS SINCE THEY WILL PROBABLY LIE ANYWAY. "SOME OF THEM MIGHT EVEN BE 50;" SHE GIGGLES MISCHIEVOUSLY. SHE SASHAYS FROM THE COSTUME ROOMS; PROUDLY POINTING OUT THE NEW GREEN ROOM; SMOKING CONSTANTLY; AND RATTLING ON VIVACIOUSLY IN RAPID SPANISH. "I LIKE TO PERFORM FOR TOURISTS;" SHE SAYS; "BUT I LIKE IT

BETTER HERE ON THE WEEKENDS WHEN THE WORKERS COME IN FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE."

"THEY GIVE THEM A SPECIAL RATE; YOU KNOW; EIGHT PESOS FOR EVERYTHING. I LOVE TO DANCE FOR CUBANS. THEY ARE MY PEOPLE;" AND SHE DOES A LITTLE RHUMBA THERE IN HER DRESSING ROOM. "THEY HAVE SO MUCH ENERGY AND ARE SO APPRECIATIVE."

SHE LEADS A VISITOR OUT TO THE NIGHTCLUB; AN ENORMOUS OUTDOOR

AREA WITH BRIGHT COLORED LIGHTS ILLUMINATING THE MYRIAD PALM TREES;
A LATIN BAND PLAYING DANCE MUSIC; CROWDS OF PEOPLE WAITING FOR THE
SHOW. THE CLUB IS COMPLETELY UNCHANGED FROM BEFORE THE
REVOLUTION EXCEPT FOR THE ABSENCE OF CASONOS. AFTER A RATHER
TEMPERATMENTAL SCENE WITH THE HEADWAITER; TRYING TO SECURE A GOOD
SEAT FOR HER FRIENDS; SHE LEADS THE WAY TO A TABLE IN THE CENTER
OF THE CLUB; PREENING AND BEAMING AND WAVING TO HER FANS WHO HAVE
RECOGNIZED HER IN THE DIM LIGHT. SHE DEPARTS AFTER A FEW MINUTES.
"I HOPE YOU ENJOY 'EL ECHO' (THE SHOW) SHE SAYS."

SHE IS ALMOST A PARODY OF A SPANISH DANCER; SO GALICIAN IS PRIMA
BALLERINA; ALICIA ALONSO. PITCH BLACK HAIR PULLED TIGHT AROUND HER
SKULL; DAZZLING SLOE EYES; BLACKENED BY KOHL; SLANTED BY NATURE;
A LONG PATRICIAN NOSE; RUBY LIPS; ALABASTER SKIN - ALL
COMPLEMENT A FIERY TEMPERAMENT; A SLIGHTLY ARROGANT MANNER.

SHE DANCED GISELLE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS; A FEW WEEKS
AGO. YES; THERE WERE THE BRIGHT LIGHTS ON THE EDGE OF THE STAGE SO
SHE COULD SEE WHERE SHE WAS GOING. SHE WAS SPECTACTULAR. AND THEY
DIED OVER HER. CURTAIN CALL AFTER CURTAIN CALL; BRAVO AFTER
BRAVO; THEY LITTERED THE STAGE WITH ROSES AND SOBBED AND SCREAMED
AND SHE WAS CRYING; TOO.

"SOMETIMES," SHE SAYS LATER; "IT TIRES YOU MORE; THE EMOTION;
THAN THE ACTUAL MOVEMENT ITSELF."

AND SHE IS TORN; THE CONTRADICTION OF WANTING PERSONAL ACCLAIM;
WHICH SHE HAS GARNERED ALL OVER THE WORLD ("I HAVE SO MANY FRIENDS;

SO MANY WONDERFUL ADMIRERS EVERYWHERE,' AND OF WANTING TO BE A
GOOD COMMUNIST; A GOOD REVOLUTIONARY; A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
PEOPLE.

(MORE TO COME)

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1ST ADD DANCERS (QUINN; POST) (FOREIGN; WOMEN; ENTERTAINMENT)

XXX OF THE PEOPLE.

"I NEVER WANTED TO BE A STAR;" SHE WILL SAY WITHOUT CONVICTION.

"I WANTED TO BE A DANCER."

"THERE ARE TWO THINGS I FEEL ABOUT BEING A STAR. IT GIVES
ME A CERTAIN WARMTH; A CERTAIN WONDERFUL FEELING INSIDE; A CERTAIN
FEELING OF HAPPINESS. BUT IT ALSO GIVES ME A CERTAIN FEELING OF
RESPONSIBILITY IN WHAT I DO. WHEN YOU DANCE FOR THE PEOPLE;
SOMETIMES YOU THINK; HOW CAN I GIVE IT BACK AND THAT'S WHEN YOU
GET VERY WORRIED.

"BUT THE INSIDE PART; FOR EXAMPLE THE RECEPTION I GOT AFTER I DANCED
GISELLE; WELL; OF COURSE; THAT WAS SMETHING TREMENDOUS; THAT WAS
SOMETHING REALLY BEAUTIFUL . . ."

REGLA BECERRA ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A DANCER AT THE TROPICANA EVEN WHEN SHE WAS A LITTLE GIRL. BUT OF COURSE IN THOSE DAYS HER FATHER WOULD NEVER HAVE APPROVED. THEN, AFTER THE REVOLUTION, AND THINGS CHANGED, SHE WENT TO A REVOLUTIONARY SCHOOL FOR DANCERS AND TRAINED IN EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUE, DOING FOLKLORIC DANCES WITH AN AFRICAN INFLUENCE.

THE GROUP SHE DANCED WITH WAS QUITE GOOD AND SHE WAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED WHEN SHE FIRST WENT TO THE TROPICANA. THE GROUP WAS ALSO QUITE DISCIPLINED, BEING A REVOLUTIONARY SCHOOL, SOME OF WHOSE MEMBERS HAD ACTUALLY BEEN INVOLVED IN THE REVOLUTION.

"WHEN I FIRST CAME TO THE TROPICANA," SAYS BECERRA, "MOST OF THE OLD GIRLS, THOSE BAD ELEMENTS HAD LEFT THE COUNTRY. BUT THE ONES WHO STAYED WERE TRYING TO CORRUPT THE NEW GIRLS BY GETTING THEM TO GO OUT WITH THESE MEN, AND NATURALLY A FEW OF THE GIRLS WERE SWEEPED INTO THIS."

"THEY DIDN'T TRY TO INFLUENCE ME THOUGH. I WENT THERE AS A STAR. THERE WAS A CERTAIN DISTANCE BETWEEN THE STAR AND THE CHORISTAS (SHE SAYS THAT WORD WITH JUST A TWINGE OF DISDAIN). THEY DIDN'T KNOW ME BUT AS THEY GOT TO KNOW ME THEY SAW MY WAY OF BEHAVING WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. SOME OF THEM RESENTED ME FOR THIS. BUT FOR ME, THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO THOUGHT OF EXPLOITATION IN MY BEING A DANCER."

THIS WAS A DIFFICULT PERIOD FOR HER, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE TENSION AT THE TROPICANA BUT BECAUSE OF THE TENSION DEVELOPING AT HOME WITH HER FAMILY.

"AT THE BEGINNING," SHE SAYS, "MY FATHER LIKED THE REVOLUTION.

"AND THOUGH I WAS ONLY 12 I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING."

"I ADMIRER FIDEL; LIKE ANYBODY. BUT AS TIME PASSED ON AND I SAW THE PROGRESS OF THE REVOLUTION I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND TO THE DEGREE THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE. MY PARENTS WERE GETTING OLD. THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ALL OF IT. MY FATHER OWNED A PRIVATE BOXING GYMNASIUM. AS HE SAW THE PROGRESSION OF INTERVENTION IN PRIVATE BUSINESSES; HIS GYM WAS NATIONALIZED; HE DECIDED TO LEAVE. HE COULD HAVE STAYED ON AS THE DIRECTOR.

"I HAVE TWO YOUNGER SISTERS. THEY STAYED IN CUBA. MY PARENTS LEFT IN 1967. I HAVEN'T SEEN THEM SINCE."

SHE SHRUGS AND LOOKS AWAY; A BITTER EXPRESSION FORMING ON HER MOUTH. "WELL; IT MUST NOT HAVE BEEN VERY HARD FOR THEM TO LEAVE BECAUSE THEY LEFT. AT THE BEGINNING THEY DISCUSSED IT WITH US. WE TRIED TO EXPLAIN THE REVOLUTION TO THEM. BUT THEY HAD FRIENDS WHO PERSUADED THEM TO COME TO MIAMI. THAT INFLUENCED THEM THE MOST. BUT I THINK THAT THEY CANNOT BE VERY HAPPY. BECAUSE THEY HAD TO LEAVE EVERYTHING. IF REGLA BECERRA CAME TO DANCE BECAUSE OF THE REVOLUTION; THEN ALICIA ALONSO CAME TO THE REVOLUTION BECAUSE OF THE DANCE.

"I WENT TO CHICAGO FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 1959," SAYS ALICIA ALONSO. "I WAS IN CHICAGO WHEN THEY CALLED ME AND TOLD ME ABOUT THE REVOLUTION. I FULFILLED MY OBLIGATION THERE AND CAME BACK IMMEDIATELY. I HAD BEEN AWARE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN MY COUNTRY. AND WE HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN SOME REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY IN OUR

BALLET SCHOOL. WE USED TO HIDE THINGS HERE; PRINT THINGS; COLLECT MONEY; DO ANYTHING TO HELP OUR REVOLUTION. I DID AN INTERVIEW IN CHICAGO THREE DAYS BEFORE THE REVOLUTION. I MADE A STATEMENT ABOUT IT. AND IT SURPRISED ME THE WAY I EXPRESSED MY FEELINGS. I HAD NEVER HEARD THEM; I HAD ONLY JUST FELT THEM. I READ IT AND THOUGHT: 'HOW COULD I EXPRESS MYSELF SO CLEARLY?' I NEVER EVEN HAD ANY IDEA OF COMMUNISM. I WAS AGAINST THE OLD GOVERNMENT BECAUSE THEY MADE IT SO DIFFICULT FOR US TO DANCE. I WAS FORCED TO STOP DANCING IN CUBA IN 1956 BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT CUT OFF OUR SUBSIDIES. I'M NOT A PARTY MEMBER NOW BUT I AM A COMMUNIST.'

ASK ALONSO HOW THE REVOLUTION HAS CHANGED HER LIFE AND SHE WILL ONLY SAY RHETORICALLY;

"IT HAS NOT CHANGED MY LIFE. IT HAS ENRICHED MY LIFE." BUT THAT IS NOT TOTALLY TRUE. THERE HAVE BEEN MANY CHANGES IN HER LIFE SINCE 1959.

ONE OF THEM HAS BEEN HER GRADUAL ACCEPTANCE OF HERSELF AS A PERSON RATHER THAN A WIFE-DANCER. BUT OF COURSE; THAT CREATED CONFLICTS IN HER MARRIAGE.

SHE WAS MARRIED FOR MANY YEARS TO DANCER-CHOREOGRAPHER FERNANDO ALONSO AND THEY FORMED THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CUBA TOGETHER. THREE YEARS AGO THEY DIVORCED AND SHE IS NOW REMARRIED

TO WRITER-LAWYER PEDRO SIMON.

(MORE TO COME)

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2D ADD DANCE (QUINN; POST) (FOREIGN; WOMEN; ENTERTAINMENT)

XXX PEDRO SIMON.

"I WAS BROUGHT UP IN A TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE," SHE SAYS.

"I WAS MARRIED MANY MANY YEARS. I CAME FROM A VERY STRICT BOURGEOIS MILITARY FAMILY. I TRIED TO BEHAVE THE WAY MY FAMILY THOUGHT I SHOULD. IN SPITE OF MOVING IN A VERY LARGE WORLD OF DANCE I KEPT THE TRADITION OF MY MARRIAGE. MAYBE THAT'S WHY IT TOOK SO LONG TO BREAK. WHEN IT BROKE IT WAS A SHAME. BUT MAYBE IT SHOULD HAVE BROKEN BEFORE. WELL, WE'RE BOTH VERY HAPPY NOW. WE DID WONDERFUL THINGS FOR OUR COUNTRY. WE STILL ARE DOING THEM.

"NOW WITH THE REVOLUTION WE HAVE SIMPLY THE IDEA OF A MAN HELPING A WOMAN IN HER WORK. IN MY CASE WE HELP EACH OTHER VERY MUCH. IF I HAVE TO COME HERE TO THE SCHOOL, HE STAYS HOME AND HELPS AROUND THE HOUSE. BEFORE, IF MY HUSBAND ARRIVED AT HOME HE WANTED HIS WIFE THERE. SO I WOULD GET HOME AND WAIT."

"NOW THERE IS MORE PARTNERSHIP, MORE MUTUAL RESPECT. THIS IS A PHENOMENON IN OUR COUNTRY. AND THIS IS A LATIN COUNTRY."

THOUGH SHE IS ALSO AN AVID FAN OF THE REVOLUTION THERE ARE CONFLICTS IN REGLA BECERRA'S LIFE AS WELL; CONFLICTS SHE SOMETIMES SEEMS UNAWARE OF. CONFLICTS ABOUT MARRIAGE; ABOUT MONEY; ABOUT WANTING TO BE A STAR VERSUS THE REVOLUTIONARY GOAL OF SUBMERGING ONE'S INDIVIDUALITY.

"YES," SHE SAYS; "I AM MARRIED. I AM MARRIED TO A MAN WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE CUBAN ROWING TEAM; HE IS IN SPORTS. I HAVE A CHILD BY ANOTHER MARRIAGE."

SHE ALSO SAYS THAT SHE HAS A VERY LIBERATED RELATIONSHIP WITH HER HUSBAND. "IN A MARRIAGE WHERE THE WOMAN WORKS; ONE HAS COMPLETE FREEDOM. SO WHEN YOU'VE BEEN WORKING APART ALL DAY WHEN YOU COME HOME THERE IS HARMONY. WE ARE UNITED. WE SPLIT THE HOUSEWORK. BEFORE; MEN USED TO REACT AGAINST THAT. NOW YOU CAN FEEL THAT MEN'S ATTITUDES ABOUT THAT AND ABOUT WOMEN HAVE CHANGED."

THERE IS MORE CONVERSATION AND SUDDENLY IT IS REVEALED THAT REGLA BECERRA IS NOT MARRIED AFTER ALL. SHE JUST LIVES WITH THE MAN.

"WELL," SHE SAYS; SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSED; "I SHOULD BE. LEGALLY. BECAUSE A MAN AND A WOMAN; WELL; I THINK IT IS CORRECT. WHEN YOU CONTINUE LIVING WITH A PERSON YOU TAKE RESPONSIBILITIES WITH SOCIETY."

AND WHEN DOES SHE PLAN TO GET MARRIED?

"PRONTO," SHE SAYS WITH A DETERMINED SMILE.

WHETHER SHE IS MARRIED OR NOT; BECERRA HAS NO WORRIES ABOUT MONEY.

"WHEN I STARTED I EARNED ABOUT 400 PESOS A MONTH (NEARLY \$500)"

SHE SAYS. "THEN WITH MY WORK IN TV AND THEATER I WAS MAKING ABOUT

\$1,000 A MONTH. IN THOSE DAYS WE HAD THE IDEA THAT THINGS MIGHT CHANGE BACK TO CAPITALISM. BUT THEN OUR UNION GOT TOGETHER AND DECIDED THAT THERE WAS TOO MUCH DISPARITY IN SALARIES. THAT HAPPENED IN ALL THE PROFESSIONS. I VOTED FOR THAT RULE THOUGH IT REDUCED MY SALARY TO 300 PESOS A MONTH; WHICH IS WHAT I MAKE NOW."

"AT THAT TIME, TOO, THERE WAS TOO MUCH SPENDING GOING ON AND MOST OF THE PEOPLE HAD TOO MUCH MONEY. AND THERE WAS NOTHING TO SPEND IT ON. PEOPLE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THEIR MONEY BECAUSE EVERYTHING WAS RATIONED."

BUT WHAT ABOUT HER DESIRE FOR MATERIAL THINGS; LIKE NICE CLOTHES; A BEAUTIFUL CAR; A NICE HOUSE. SHE PULLS HERSELF UP STOICALLY AND SAYS: "IT HAS NEVER ENTERED MY THOUGHTS."

ASK REGLA BECERRA WHAT HER MAJOR CONCERN IS AND SHE WILL SAY: "I DON'T THINK I HAVE REACHED THE PINNACLE OF SUCCESS YET." THEN SHE CATCHES HERSELF. "I WOULD LIKE TO BE AN ARTIST OF QUALITY IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR SYSTEM; OF COURSE." AND SHE PICKS UP ON THE PARTY LINE. "IN THE OLD DAYS THEY MADE MYTHS OF PEOPLE. AND THERE WAS ENORMOUS PROPAGANDA TO BE FAMOUS. NOWADAYS, YOU ARE PART OF THE PEOPLE. YOU BELONG TO THE PEOPLE."

THE SIGNS OF THE AGE ARE THERE; PARTICULARLY IN HER HANDS. AND
THOUGH HER DARK GLASSES HIDE THE DELICATE LINES AROUND HER EYES;
NEARLY BLIND AFTER YEARS OF MURDEROUS CATARACT OPERATIONS;
SHE IS CLEARLY CLOSE TO 60.

THE LAST OPERATION; FIVE YEARS AGO; KEPT HER AWAY FROM HER BELOVED
DANCE FOR THREE YEARS; BUT NOW SHE IS PERFORMING ONCE AGAIN. SHE
WAS HERE LAST APRIL TO DANCE FOR THE AMERICAN BALLET THEATER. "THEY
TOLD ME;" SHE SAYS TRIUMPHANTLY; "THAT I WOULD NEVER DANCE
AGAIN."

SHE LOOKS DOWN AT HER HANDS; COVERED WITH RINGS; HER PERFECTLY
POLISHED NAILS PLAYING WITH HER GOLD BRACELET.

THEN; WITH LESS CONFIDENCE; "I NEVER BELIEVED THEM BEFORE; BUT
THIS LAST TIME I HAD MY DOUBTS."

SHE IS STILL VAIN; ALICIA ALONSO. TO THIS DAY SHE REFUSES
TO REVEAL HER AGE. "YES;" SHE SAYS; "EYES NARROWING TO TINY
SLITS;" IT WOULD BE RUDE TO ASK. I NEVER SAY IT."

"I WOULD BE VERY HAPPY IF THEY SEE ME DANCE AND SAY; SHE'S
80 OR 90 AND ISN'T SHE WONDERFUL!"

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Keith J. Martin
Director

ALICIA ALONSO TO OPEN SAN DIEGO BALLET SEASON

The legendary Cuban ballerina, Alicia Alonso, will open the San Diego Ballet's 1977-78 season in two performances of "Giselle" on November 11 and 12 and one performance of a pas de deux program on November 13 at the Civic Theatre, 3rd and B Streets, San Diego.

Following this initial three-performance weekend, the San Diego Ballet's acclaimed version of "The Nutcracker" with guest artist Galina Panov will play six performances December 15-18.

Concluding the series on March 17 and 18, 1978, will be Spring Premier Repertory with guests Susan Lovelle and Paul Russell, stars of the Dance Theatre of Harlem.

Miss Alonso will perform her well-known role, Giselle, for the first time on West Coast since 1958 when she appeared at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles. On September 29 of this year, she dances "Giselle" in a special Gala Performance with American Ballet Theatre in New York City. ^{script} ~~Her next performances are with the San Diego Ballet.~~

In "Giselle" and the program of pas de deux, Miss Alonso will be partnered by Jorge Esquivel, principal dancer of Ballet Nacional de Cuba.

Miss Alonso, former prima ballerina of American Ballet Theatre and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, returned to her native Cuba in 1960 to found and direct the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. In recent years, this company of 75 dancers with Miss Alonso as prima ballerina has received acclaim throughout the world.

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